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Mr. John McConnell, CD

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The Cosmos Club Symposium of 28 April

I was asked to record my impressions of the symposium sponsored by the Senior Research Staff at the Cosmos Club on 28 April which I attended as a representative of OO. The subject of the symposium was a report on Soviet research in the behavioral sciences. [ ] of OSI presented the report, which summarized the findings of a special study group which he heads. Formal comments were made by three guest scientists, and some general discussion followed.

[ ] presentation consisted of an account of certain recent developments in Soviet scientific research and an interpretation of these developments. The interpretation included the following main assertions: (1) that Soviet attention to research in the behavioral sciences has sharply increased in recent years; (2) that this spurt in research activity stems from a high political decision, and that it reflects a comprehensive and centrally organized program; and (3) that this program embodies a grand strategy for creating a "new Soviet man" and perfecting political warfare techniques against the West.

This brief account of the elements of [ ] presentation fails to convey the breezy oversimplifications in which it was couched and the primitive concept of Soviet reality which it projected. For example, [ ] said--and I paraphrase him closely--that "Gosplan is, of course, the central headquarters for planning the transition to communism." The implication was that Gosplan administered not only the national economic plan (which is, in fact, the limits of its competence) but also the "comprehensive and centrally organized program" of scientific research referred to above. Further, he said--and again I paraphrase--that "Marxism-Leninism has been discarded in the Soviet Union" (in favor of cybernetics, it was implied). This remark, in substance, was repeated several times in several contexts, and while [ ] assented to a partial qualification of this statement at the end of the meeting, his use of the statement illustrates at least the carelessness of his phraseology.

Carelessness with facts was, for me, the salient feature of the presentation. Many statements were made that this or that "fact" supported this or that conclusion, but the "facts" were never pinned down, citations were not offered--or where offered, were not given accurately and with quotations. For example, when asked to document his statement that "Marxism-Leninism had been discarded," [ ] referred to an article by one Arab-Ogly in a certain

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25X1A9a issue of Voprosy Filosofii. I subsequently found the article, although the citation given was wrong. In it, Norbert Wiener (the inventor of cybernetics) was credited--along with Einstein--with having made a "permanent" contribution to "materialism and dialectics" in his practical activity, although his "philosophical utterances" were discounted as "idealistic small change." There was nothing in the article to support the statement that Marxism-Leninism had been discarded. Similarly, [ ] placed great stress on a program of "30 topics of research" which allegedly constituted the prime evidence of the "comprehensive and centrally organized" nature of the scientific research program. Actually, the 30 topics referred to represented an outline of the scientific "seven-year plan" adopted at a regular annual meeting of the Academy of Sciences in 1959. As such, it was not essentially different from the plans normally adopted in all fields to coincide with the initiation of new state plan periods. Curiously, in the light of [ ] thesis, the topics listed in the plan included only one or two related to cybernetics, and ran the gamut from atomic physics to linguistics.

25X1A9a [ ] and his group have made a contribution to intelligence in drawing attention to certain new developments in Soviet science. They have performed a disservice by presenting this evidence in Orwellian imagery which cloaks rather than clarifies the meaning of these developments. Their basic error consists in forcing their evidence into a preconceived model of the Soviet system which is highly oversimplified. They are unable to conceive of spontaneous movements in Soviet intellectual life. Thus they take every new movement as a sign of strategic calculation. I submit that the evidence they have accumulated testifies to the vitality of Soviet scientific life, and to the tendency toward experimentation which is generated by scientific research. This, I submit further, is a more interesting phenomenon--and in the long run a more significant one--than the phenomenon which they think they see.

I would not wish the above remarks to be taken as a criticism of the conduct of the symposium. It was held in a businesslike way, and the discussion of the purely scientific aspects of the subject was of a high order.

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